



Natalie K. Kelly
Chief Executive Officer
Florida Association of Managing Entities
122 S. Calhoun Street
Tallahassee, FL 32301
natalie@flmanagingentities.com

February 4, 2021

The Honorable Ron DeSantis
The Capitol
400 S. Monroe St.
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Governor DeSantis:

On behalf of Florida's seven Managing Entities, which oversee the behavioral health safety net of more than 300 providers that serves more than 320,000 Floridians, we thank you for your prioritization of mental health services. You and First Lady DeSantis have steadfastly advocated for the funding, resources and coordination that are required to address Floridians' mental health needs so they can lead healthy lives. We thank you for your leadership.

As you and the Florida Surgeon General continue to support access for Floridians to the COVID-19 vaccine, we respectfully ask for your support of our efforts to educate statewide counties and our local Department of Health (DOH) workforce on three key points that will save lives within the vulnerable mental health population in Florida.

- 1) Frontline healthcare workers -already defined in your priorities- should be understood to include frontline healthcare workers serving in behavioral health hospitals, clinics, and residential congregate living settings. They warrant the same priority status for [vaccination](#).
- 2) Behavioral health populations are known to have higher rates of the general medical risk conditions, such as diabetes, heart disease, pulmonary disease – conditions already defined in your priorities, which warrant the same priority status for vaccination.
- 3) Patients with mental health and substance use disorders in congregate living settings, which are just like nursing homes in terms of risk for transmission due to staff bringing risk from the community and patients being vulnerable, warrant the same priority status for vaccination.

We remain concerned that vaccination for our health care workers, congregate living facilities, and patients continue to significantly lag behind vaccination of general medical health care



workers, vaccination of nursing homes, and vaccination of high-risk patients without behavioral health problems.

There is a long history in the United States of public sector patients with mental health conditions losing 15 to 25 years of life expectancy due to inadequate health care for general medical conditions, including infectious diseases. We seek to partner with you and Dr. Rivkees to demonstrate a different outcome in Florida during COVID-19.

We ask that you consider allowing us to coordinate with DOH and local counties to effectively and expeditiously vaccinate this population.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health and substance use issues among Floridians and increased the number of uninsured residents that our network serves. Our contracted and accountable behavioral health care providers are on the front lines of addressing mental health and substance use disorder issues, and we appreciate your consideration of helping us to keep these community providers and their patients safe during this unprecedented and extraordinarily challenging time.

We appreciate your leadership in addressing Florida's mental health needs, and we are grateful for your consideration of our request to prioritize mental health residential facilities' patients and staff for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Natalie K. Kelly". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Natalie K. Kelly, Chief Executive Officer
Florida Association of Managing Entities